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THE BREEDING HERONS OF TENNESSEE

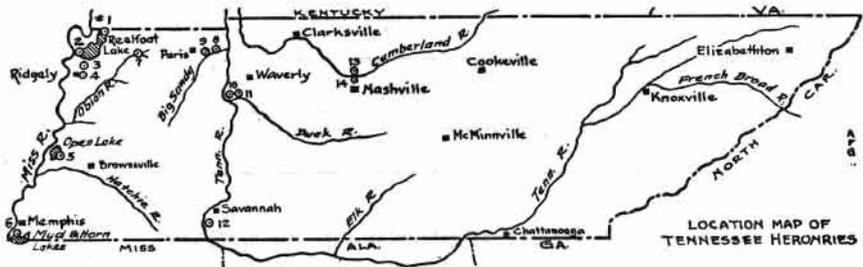
By ALBERT F. GANIER

Because of their retiring disposition, highly specialized requirements, and localized distribution, much less is known of herons than of most other birds. Of the ten species of herons found in North America, seven are to be found nesting in Tennessee at the present time, and since the writer has been especially interested in these thru the years, some of his observations and experiences are offered under the species headings which follow. The other three, viz, the Great White Heron of the Florida Keys, the Reddish Egret, and the Louisiana Heron, are Gulf coast species and, except for the latter, are not likely to be recorded in Tennessee even in the post-breeding season migrations of late summer. Our only record of the last mentioned is of one recorded by Ben B. Coffey near Memphis on July 18, 1948.

While the series of artificial lakes that have been created by dams along our large rivers in recent years would seem likely to increase the number of heronries of these colonial nesting birds, these conditions have apparently not developed. All heronries now known to exist were in use prior to the artificial lakes or are at points where none were created. Clean shorelines and fluctuating levels do not produce the food required by most herons for the raising of their young. Instead, they prefer the wooded swamps, the sluggish streams and the natural shallow marshy lakes where aquatic life is more stable and more nearly to be counted on during the nesting season.

For convenient reference, the accompanying map has been prepared to show location of the heronries and these are numbered to facilitate reference in the text. It is quite probable that additional heronries exist, especially those of small size and in the western part of the state. Among those shown, the actual heronries at numbers 5, 6 and 7, at Lake Obion, Open Lake, and Mud-Horn Lakes, were not found but are undoubtedly present in the surrounding swamps because Great Blue Herons and American Egrets are present in numbers all during the nesting season.

WARD'S GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias wardi*).—No nesting colonies have as yet been found eastward from the western bend of the Tennessee River, nor have suitable areas existed for their establishment. That part of the State is hilly, well drained, and only small marshes exist. The most noted heronry in the State is "Cranetown" (2) which is located in the flooded forest adjoining the southwest margin of Reelfoot lake. It was my pleasure to discover this great heronry on May 26, 1921, on a special trip made for the purpose, and since that time it has been visited by hundreds of ornithologists from far and near. The nests were built high in the old cypress trees,



from 70 to 90 feet above the water in which they stood, and as well as I could estimate by climbing to the tops of several trees, there were approximately 300 nests of the Great Blue Heron and 100 of the Double-crested Cormorant. My next visit was on May 29 and 30, 1932, at which time I estimated 300 nests of the Great Blues, 200 Cormorants, 450 of the American Egret and 50 of the Water Turkey, the latter two species having come in in the meantime. A visit on May 28, 1933, showed that 12 pairs of Black-crowned Night Herons had added their presence and were nesting at mid-levels. An earlier Reelfoot heronry, located at the Kentucky line (1), was visited by me on April 26, 1919, at which time there were 125 nests of the Great Blues and 75 of the Cormorants. This colony had formerly been used also by American Egrets, but they had been "shot out" by plume hunters some years before. When revisited in May, 1932, it contained only 13 nests: 11 of Great Blues and 2 of American Egrets. During subsequent years the nearly fledged young in this colony, especially the Cormorants, were shot for use as bait by market fishermen, so during some years the colony faded out completely.

Turning now to the valley of the western bend of the Tennessee river, three heronries have been in existence for many years. The most northerly (8) was at Sulphur Well swamp in the Big Sandy River bottoms and was described by Alfred Clebsch and the writer (1942). I had located the herons here in 1933 and when the heronry was visited in the spring of 1937, it was found to have about thirty nests of Great Blues and several nests, not yet in use, of what were believed to be Yellow-crowned Night Herons. On June 20, 1942, the colony was still intact, without apparent increase and one of the Yellow-crowns was seen. All the nests were in the tops of tupelo trees and averaged fifty feet above the knee-deep water of the swamp. During the following winter the T.V.A. cleared all of the trees from the site to make way for flooding the valley for reservoir purposes and the herons moved to a new location (9) a few miles westward. This was described by Eugent Cypert (1949) who on a visit on May 28, 1949, believed there to be about 100 nests, all of the Great Blues. This heronry was similar to the one it succeeded.

At the mouth of Duck river (10) there had existed for many years a good sized heronry in a wooded swamp in the wide Tennessee River bottoms. This too was cleared off in 1943 and the herons established a

new breeding colony (11) in a small grove of young cypress a few miles eastward. These stood in fairly deep water during nesting season. The writer, with Mr. Cypert and others, visited this colony on April 3, 1949, and estimated that there were 350 nests of the Great Blues and 150 of American Egrets. We paddled our boats about under the trees to see if any other species were nesting but found none. However, in some dead oaks standing in water several hundred yards away, there were about 100 nests of the Double-crested Cormorant. Several hundred acres of bottom land behind the levees here become and remain submerged until they are pumped out in late May and this condition has so greatly increased the size of the colonies that they now rank second only to Reelfoot's "Cranetown".

Further southward another colony of Great Blues was found by the writer on May 30, 1926, in the Tennessee River bottoms of Hardin county, about two miles southeast of Pittsburg landing (12). This was located in one of a series of wooded sloughs, grown up with bushes, cypress, and other trees. There were 20 nests of this species and in nearby trees there were 3 nests of Yellow-crowned Night Herons. Of the Great Blue nests, 17 were built near the top of a large old cypress and three more were in an adjacent and smaller cypress. These herons had not been "shot up" so were quite unwary and remained in the tree as I stood beneath it. The nests contained young of various sizes and the ground beneath was heavily covered with chalky excreta. I did not revisit the locality until May 1948, at which time I watched herons going into the slough and assume this colony remains static, since feeding and other conditions remained unchanged.

If in future this species is found nesting in East Tennessee, it is most likely that they will be found to be this subspecies pushing its range up the Tennessee valley, rather than the smaller, darker race, *A. h. herodius*, pioneering southward.

AMERICAN EGRET (*Casmerodius albus egretta*)—Here is a species that has effected a remarkable come-back from the days when it was almost exterminated by plume hunters, for during the past 30 years it has reentered Tennessee and is now nesting regularly. It has also begun to nest again in the states north of the Ohio river. On my first visits to the Reelfoot heronries, 1919 and 1921, there was not a single Egret in either. By 1932, there were approximately 450 of their nests in "Cranetown" (2) and they were also present in the smaller colony at the Kentucky line. They have maintained their numbers on Reelfoot Lake and enlist so much interest from visitors that local hunters and fishermen no longer molest them. A few of them may be seen regularly during spring at Open Lake (5) in Lauderdale Co., and at Mud and Horn Lakes south of Memphis (6) and doubtless comprise a full share of the as yet unfound heronries adjoining those lakes. Perhaps the most pleasing new outpost of this come-back is their joining with the Great Blues to augment the herony located where Duck river flows into the Tennessee (11). On the previously mentioned visit of April 3, 1949, Mr. Cypert and the writer estimated that of the 500 heron nests in use there, approximately 150 were those of this Egret. Some further details may be had by referring to the remarks under Great Blue Heron, a species with which the

Egrets seem quite congenial. At Reelfoot, it was noted that the Egret nests were made of willow twigs and were not placed far from the center of the trees. By way of comparison, the Great Blues' nests were made of durable cypress twigs, were placed well out on the limbs and often lasted for years. The latter are first to lay and many of their nests will have young before the bulk of the Egrets have begun to incubate in late April. There is a very marked post-nesting season wandering of these Egrets and they are reported each year in nearly all of the Eastern states during late July and August.

SNOWY EGRET (*Leucophoyx thula thula*)—One of the most pleasant surprises of the 1950 nesting season was that of extending the present breeding range of this little white egret northward into Tennessee, from a point sixty miles south of Memphis where Ben B. Coffey reported it nesting at Moon Lake (1943). This Tennessee heronry (4) is composed almost entirely of this species and of the Little Blue Heron and is located a mile east of the village of Ridgely, eight miles south of Reelfoot Lake. James L. Norman of Dyersburg had told me of some Little Blue Herons nesting here the year before, so on May 19, 1950, I visited the site and found a heronry quite different from any I had seen before. Because of density of nests and heavy foliage, a close estimate was not possible, but there were between 700 and 1000 nests in the relatively low trees. About 90% of these were of the Little Blues and 10% (70 to 100) were of the Snowy Egret. In the center of the colony two Black-crowned Night Herons were seen sitting on their nests high in the willows, and several hundred feet away, four nests of the Green Heron were found. This heronry occupies a swampy area of about twelve acres, covered with low trees and thickets and near the center of which is a long, shallow, two acre pond in which thorn and willow trees grow. Flanking the pond are thickets of ironwood trees covered with vines, as well as other growth. The heronry was unusual in that this small haven was entirely surrounded with thousands of acres of well-tilled cotton fields in which many workers were ploughing and working the crops. The herons flew back and forth to their distant feeding grounds, along small bayous and little swamps or perhaps to shallow Isom's Lake, a few miles northward, without noticing or being noticed by the workers. I learned from people who lived in two dwellings a few hundred yards away that the birds had used the place for years. The knee-deep pond, which goes dry in late summer, was studded with thorn (honey locust) trees about twenty feet high and it was in this water protected area that the first nesters had begun to lay. Most of the trees held several nests and as this area became crowded, late nesters began building or repairing old nests about the edge of the pond, in all covering an area about 150 by 300 feet in extent. The thorn tree nests contained young, from one to ten days old. The water and ground under these trees was littered with the shells of eggs that had hatched. The ironwood trees had broad, thick tops and some contained a dozen nests, averaging nine feet above the ground. These held four or five eggs, some being fresh. The two species mingled their nests together and there was little to differentiate them except the slightly smaller size of the eggs of the Egret. The latter, as they stood by their nests, frequently raised their aigrette plumes for display. All through the heronry were nests of the Bronzed Grackle, some

even touching nests of the herons. There were about 100 of these and nearly all examined held fresh eggs. Along the road within a few miles of Ridgley, a dozen American Egrets were seen and these probably have a small heronry near, perhaps with Great Blues, for Reelfoot's "Cranetown", ten miles north, would seem too far.

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Florida caerulea caerulea*).—The only large nesting colony (4) of these birds known to me in the State is that also occupied by the preceding species, and which I believe is sufficiently described just above. It might be added that as I approached the heronry, a number of Little Blues were in an adjacent weed patch, picking up and breaking off dead weed stems to carry to unfinished nests. One of these was a year-old bird whose plumage was nearly white. All others of this species were in mature solid blue plumage with maroon colored necks. Their beaks at this season are conspicuously blue, of an indigo shade. The only other place I have found this heron to breed is at Reelfoot Lake, some miles northward. Here, on May 25, 1919, I encountered a nesting colony of a dozen pair along the canal a mile south of the lake (3). The nests were built in two large willow trees and held young several weeks old at the time. Previously, on May 1, 1919, I came across a group of five in the swamp at the north end of the lake and feel sure there must have been a small nesting colony nearby. So far as I can find, these are the most northerly breeding points for this species.

EASTERN GREEN HERON (*Butorides virescens virescens*).—Being well distributed all over the State, this is the best known of all our herons. It is not often colonial in its nesting habits although sometimes as many as a half dozen pair will nest together where feeding conditions are good. Much more often there is only a single nest in a locality and this may be as much as a mile from its regular feeding ground. It is a habitant of all the major and lesser rivers of the State as well as the lakes, creeks, and such few marshes as we have. Nests in woods and along streams are sometimes thirty feet above the ground while those in button-bush marshes are usually only a few feet above the water. The average height is about twelve feet. I have occasionally found them nesting in pines and cedars. The nests are carefully constructed of well chosen twigs and last thru succeeding winters. They are so thin however that the five blue eggs (some times four or even six) can often be seen from the ground beneath. Watching a Green Heron while it is feeding is an interesting experience for every small aquatic creature that moves is deftly captured and often with the most clownish maneuvers. In THE MIGRANT for Sept. 1939, Dr. Arthur McMurray has an interesting account of one which he kept for a pet for some time after mending its broken wing. The average date of first spring arrivals at Nashville is April 7.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax hoactli*).—Although widely distributed over North America during the breeding season this usually colonial nesting species has so far been found nesting at only three locations in Tennessee. Because of being nocturnal in its feeding habits, it can be easily overlooked and there are probably as yet unfound

colonies. It was first found nesting at Reelfoot Lake, in the "Cranetown", when on May 28, 1933, I counted a dozen of their nests. These were built only fifteen to twenty feet above the water and were placed in young ash and swamp maples. They had evidently come in quite lately for the nests held fresh eggs whereas the nests of the other herons, high up in the treetops above, were filled with young. They continued to be found there by myself and others in subsequent years. On May 19, 1950, I found two birds of this species occupying nests in the Ridgely heronry, eight miles south of Reelfoot (4). This heronry is described under the section covering the Snowy Egret.

I had hardly expected to find a nesting colony in Middle Tennessee so was most agreeably surprised to locate one just four miles northwest of the Nashville courthouse (13), on April 7, 1950. The site was a cedar-clad hillside a mile north of the Cumberland River and a few hundred feet south of White's Creek. The nests were from 100 to 200 feet from a public road but were well hidden among the upper branches and foliage of large cedars. Later nests were built in deciduous trees. There were twelve to fifteen nests in all, some completed, some old ones being repaired, and some new ones being built. As I entered the heronry, all of the birds left and flew into other cedars a few hundred feet away so I seated myself partly hidden to await their return. Two neighboring Crows flew in about five minutes later and this brought the nesting herons back at once to guard their eggs, for Crows are their greatest enemies. Those with eggs settled on or beside their nests while the others flew about, breaking off dead twigs or else stealing twigs from old and as yet unclaimed nests. Before leaving, I climbed the largest cedar and on examining the four nests it contained, I found them to hold 4, 3, and 1 eggs respectively, with one empty. Only two other nests had eggs as yet and I was a little surprised at their nesting so early. Inquiry of the property owner, W. Z. Fontaine, revealed that the birds had been nesting there for at least four years and that although they would become noisy enough later on to awake the family at night, he was interested in their protection. Late one evening in June, I took a position from which I could watch the herons leave for their feeding grounds. It was well past sunset, in fact nearly dark when the first bird left, uttering a coarse squawk as it did so and headed up the White's Creek valley. They left by ones, twos, and threes, at intervals during the next fifteen minutes after which it was too dark to see the remaining ones, and they flew off in several directions. Wishing to ascertain their time of spring arrival, I visited the place on March 16, 1951, and found that four of the birds had already come in. They were napping in the largest cedar and the small amount of excrement on the ground indicated that they had only been there a day or two. There was still some snow on the ground, the remains of a six inch fall four days previous. The old nests had come thru the winter in good shape, despite the severe ice-storm of February, and there were about twenty of them. I have seen these birds on the French Broad River above Knoxville in early May and have reason to believe that small colonies exist in that area. The many little wooded

islands created by the power dam lakes in East Tennessee should make ideal nesting sites for them.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*). This distinctly southern species occurs in Tennessee at nearly if not quite the northerly limit of its breeding range. It is an uncommon species of rather solitary habits and quite particular as to its choice for a summer home. Its preference is for a swampy woodland in which there are shallow lakes, pools, or winding, sluggish streams, where water may be counted on at least until late summer. Instead of associating with others of its kind, it prefers the company of such swamp loving denizens as Prothonotary and Swainson's Warblers, raccoons, snapping turtles, mosquitoes, bullfrogs and cottonmouth moccasins. Such swamps are found at intervals in the bottoms of the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers and along the courses of many of the sluggish rivers in the western part of the State. I found the first Tennessee nests of this species on May 30, 1926, when three of their nests were found adjacent to a small colony of Great Blues. This site was near the east bank of the Tennessee River in Hardin County (12) and is described more fully under the section covering Great Blue Heron. The nests were built from forty to fifty feet up, on the lowest branches of swamp-ash trees. They were constructed on horizontal limbs at from eight to ten feet out from the trunk, this being typical for this species. One nest contained four eggs well advanced in incubation, another held young ten days old, and the third I did not climb to. In the first nest, the male was incubating and did not fly until I clapped my hands beneath the tree. At the second nest, a parent was sitting upon it with the young while the other parent stood two feet away. A parent flew from the third nest.

These birds nest sparingly about Reelfoot Lake, where W. R. Spofford flushed one from a nest on Otter Basin, May 17, 1942. I saw two about the lake on May 30, 1932, and on the following day I observed one as I crossed the Obion river near Gibbs, thirty miles eastward. With others I have observed it in one of the Cumberland River swamps near Ashland City and in Mingo swamp near Franklin, Tenn., on dates that would indicate nesting. I have mentioned above its presence at the Sulphur Well heronry, near Paris (8).

As though to give me a "break" in return for more distant and toilsome searches, three pair came to Nashville to nest in 1949, settling in a four acre woods flanking the five acre Buena Vista marsh (14). This was just north of the city limits, in a broad river bottom close to the Cumberland. While searching these woods on May 3, I startled several large birds from vine-clad water maples and looking upward, perceived two nests ten feet apart. By waiting about a few minutes, I saw them return and readily identified them. Climbing a nearby tree, I saw that the nests held eggs so left promptly in order not to discourage their pioneering. Before leaving the woods however I sought and found the nest of a pair of noisy Crows and removed the small young from it lest their parents be tempted to feed them on heron eggs. Several days later I directed several of our Nashville T. O. S. members to the spot in order that they could enjoy the unusual find. Their disappointment was keen when on arrival they found only the shells of fresh heron

eggs on the ground; the Crows had wrought destruction after all. During the winter the woods were cut away and the marsh partly drained.

The Reelfoot Lake heronries and their occupants can be found more fully described in my paper "Water Birds of Reelfoot Lake" (1933). Other references to some of the heronries mentioned, chiefly "Cranetown", may be found in the references cited below.

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THE RED-WING ROOST AT REELFOOT LAKE

By ROBERT J. DUNBAR

Those who have never had the opportunity to observe the dramatic departure at sunrise or the amazing return at sunset of the Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*), which roost during the winter in the sawgrass at Reelfoot Lake, Tennessee, may class the following account as fabulous, but before they do so they should visit Reelfoot.

On my first visit to Reelfoot Lake (1946), I was overwhelmed by the great number of Red-wings that came there to roost. Although I estimated their number in terms of millions, I hesitated to report any such astronomical figures for fear of being branded a fabricator. Since then, however, from 2,000,000 to 2,640,000 Red-wings have been reported by James L. Norman and party (1947, 1948, 1949). From my second experience at Reelfoot, which took place from December 14 through December 17, 1950, I am inclined to believe that if an estimate could be made simultaneously by a number of observers stationed at the several points of egress to check the early morning departure of Red-wings, the result would be astounding.

An hour before sunrise, on the morning of December 14, 1950, L. A. Fuller of Oak Ridge and the writer rowed along the north side of Willow Bar. Whenever we approached to within forty or fifty feet of the sawgrass we could hear a whirl of wings, the sound of which rose and fell resembling water gently lapping against the shore. In fact it sounded so much like wave action that one of the men in the boat a few yards to our stern refused to believe otherwise until the light of day disclosed the birds in motion. About one-half hour before sunrise we pushed the prow of our boat into the sawgrass at a point where the bar was less than 100 yards across. As the boat nosed into the grass, Red-wings swarmed up on both sides and settled down again a few yards away.

With the approach of sunrise the Red-wings became more and more restless, and upon the slightest provocation they would swarm above the grass tops only to settle down again a few yards to the southeast. Each successive swarming would carry them farther and farther southeast before they again settled into the sawgrass. Their movement by our place of observation was always in a southeasterly direction and as soon as one swarm would vacate a patch of sawgrass another would take its place. In the general path of the moving birds was a small clump of five or six willow trees about twenty feet in height. At one moment the bare limbs of these trees would be sharply silhouetted against the morning sky and the next they would be fully leafed out with living birds. As the surging swarms of birds continued to mass on the beach head of Willow Bar, the whirl of wings grew to a constant roar and the top of the sawgrass took on the appearance of a creeping black carpet. It was almost sunrise when suddenly, as if by a single command, the bulk of the Red-wings rose into the air and started streaming in a southeasterly direction along the

Bar, thence across the narrow stretch of water to the mainland, where they were soon lost from view.

We made a futile attempt to count the Red-wings in flight, then we tried estimating. Our best efforts resulted in 600 to 1,000 individuals passing our observation point each second. We considered that a conservative estimate was 800 per second for 30 minutes or 1,440,000 birds moving out from Willow Bar, one of perhaps a half dozen points of egress from the Reelfoot Lake Roost.

After the Red-wings had departed and the sun was high, I noticed the aged, bent-over condition of the sawgrass, and I wondered what had caused it so early in the season. It had the appearance of slough grass in the spring following the disappearance of a heavy blanket of snow. Although, in some of the protected spots around Reelfoot Lake, there were still remnants of an early snow I felt sure it had not been heavy enough to have been the sole reason for the prematurely aged condition of the stiff sawgrass. Recalling the heavy bird traffic that morning, I concluded that there could be little doubt but that the daily repetition of the many perchings and takeoffs of the many thousands of Red-wings had contributed a great deal to make the condition of the sawgrass on Willow Bar what it was.

The following morning Norman Marsden, the third member of our party from Oak Ridge, and I beached our boat at approximately the same place on Willow Bar I had been the previous morning. The Red-wings gave us a repeat performance and helped us to confirm the estimate of their numbers made on the preceding day. This morning I tried to give more attention to the individual birds, but found it next to impossible to concentrate on a single bird within a whirling mass. The Red-wing was the principle blackbird, but there were a few hundred Grackles present and perhaps two other species which I could not identify.

Before sunrise on December 16, the fourth member of our party, Joe Gorman, and the writer beached our boat in the sawgrass on the south side of Willow Bar at a point almost opposite from that where the observations on December 14th and 15th were made. This location proved to be a much better vantage point. From here we could not only observe the great stream of blackbirds depart from Willow Bar, but we could see in the distance great clouds of birds reeling and twisting in the sky as they moved eastward from the point of Green Island. Except for the bird clouds, the sky was clear. To the westward we could see an occasional bird cloud moving in that direction. From these observations, I am sure that there must be several points of egress from the Reelfoot Lake Roost. There can be little doubt of the one at Willow Bar and one at Green Island is good possibility. Norman (1949) suggests one in the vicinity of Samburg and two others on opposite sides of the Lake. Doubtless there are others. If we assume five points of egress of 1,500,000 birds each, that would be a total of 7,500,000 the confirmation or repudiation of which would make an excellent winter project for some enterprising bird club.

Although I believe that the sunrise departure of the Red-wings offers a more satisfactory opportunity for estimating the numbers roosting at Reelfoot Lake, their return at sunset has possibilities if the bird streams can be kept separated. If you drive westward along Route 21 from Troy a half hour before sunset, as I have done, you should have an experience worth the trip. On my first visit to Reelfoot (1946), I observed great reeling clouds of blackbirds moving northwest in the direction of Reelfoot Lake. As I approached the lake the bird clouds became more numerous and wave after wave was observed. As the bird clouds approached the Lake, they formed into bird streams. At Morris Camp one stream crossed the lake to Willow Bar and one stream continued along the east shore toward Samburg. In the four evenings that I spent at the Morris Camp, I noted some variation in the route of the bird streams, probably due to wind conditions. On one evening I noted a bird stream traveling toward Samburg on the west side of the trees on the east shore of the Lake while on the next evening they followed the east side of the same trees and on a third evening they must have gone directly overland to Samburg or they passed while I was busy watching the flight across the water to Willow Bar. The flights past the Morris Camp were completed by twenty-five minutes after sunset.

Another good subject for a winter project would be the determination of the daily range of the Red-wings from the roosting site at Reelfoot Lake. This might be accomplished through the cooperation of observers living or stationed at different points and distances located radially from the roost. Would that I could spend the winter with lots of free time in the vicinity of Reelfoot Lake.

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106 GLENDALE LANE, OAK RIDGE, TENN.

A GREAT HORNED OWL IN A BANDING TRAP.—ON July 23, 1950, W. C. McDaniel, patrolman on Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge, went to visit his duck banding trap on the Big Sandy Refuge Unit, and instead of finding ducks, found a Great Horned Owl and three Mourning Doves which the owl had killed. The duck trap was a pen covered with two inch mesh wire with a funnel type entrance. The throat of the entrance was about seven inches across. The trap had originally been placed in shallow water but the water level of Kentucky Lake had been lowered so that the trap was left stranded on the mud flat. The doves had been lured into the trap by the bait and the owl had been attracted by the doves. In order to have gotten into the trap, the owl must have flown into the trap entrance and walked through the throat of the entrance.

Sprunt and Chamberlain (1949 South Carolina Bird Life) report a case of a Great Horned Owl that had followed a Black Duck into a banding trap.—EUGENE CYPERT, P. O. Box 646, Paris Tenn.

THE SEASON

MEMPHIS AREA—Christmas Counts might not always be indicative of mid-winter bird life as our coldest weather is usually from about New Year's thru February. This November presented near record cold and heat with some abrupt changes, a Thanksgiving snow, and wind. This unusual early cold produced a noticeable effect on vegetation and on the individual numbers of birds, but the Christmas Count highlights were species usually found to the south and not the more northern visitors. At Memphis on Dec. 24 we recorded an American Bittern, 2 House Wrens, and a male Maryland Yellow-throat. At Tupelo, Miss. on Dec 25 a House Wren and a Catbird were seen while at Moon Lake (Lula) Miss. on Dec. 30, another Catbird, two Short-billed Marsh Wrens, and 5 Brewer's Blackbirds (R. D. Smith) were found. A female Yellow-throat was seen Jan. 20 at Horn Lake (Lakeview, Miss.) by the Barbigs while another adult Little Blue Heron was seen Feb. 5 from the highway between Grenada and Calhoun City by Newt Hanson. In late January a six-day sub-freezing period was marked by a sleet, followed by several inches of snow, then a record of brief 11° F. Ground-feeding species, already at a low, seemed almost absent from yards and parks, except for an invasion of Starlings.

The fall season at Mud Lake was very poor because of high water, but this latter favored the waterfowl in the area generally, although the Thanksgiving "norther" moved out thousands just before legal hunting started. Oct. 29 south of Memphis yielded Anhinga,—13 (President's Island, Tulliatos); White Pelican,—38 (river, Bynum); and Gt. Blue Heron,—24, and American Egret, 35 (Mud Lake). The last Least Terns were 2 on Sept. 11 near Mud Lake, with 5 Caspian Terns there on Sept. 16; 12 Black Terns were at Lonoke, Ark (RDS) on the latter date.

An uninjured immature Yellow-billed Cuckoo, just able to fly some, was examined at West Memphis, Ark., Sept. 16, a late date. Migrating Chimney Swifts appeared in less than half their usual numbers and the last were seen Oct. 18, despite mild weather. Tree Swallows reached moderate numbers in Mid-Sept. (320 on the 16th) and the Rough-wingeds less so. The last Trees were 35 at the Penal Farm, Nov. 5; a late Barn Swallow was at Lonoke, Ark. Oct. 8. On Oct 22 several transient warblers were noted at Shelby Forest:—Tennessee—5, Magnolia—2, and Black-throated Green—3 (T.O.S.): About 10:30 A.M. on Oct. 1 an unusual flight of Broad-winged Hawks was observed. About 153 in two loose groups were seen moving slowly to the southwest. J. E. Jolly reported that he saw several hundred passing over Riverside Park one fall day in 1949; some were so low as to be readily identified and all were apparently Broad-wingeds. Previously, 6 reported for Sept. 28, 1947 (Migrant, 18:62, 1947), was the highest recorded. (Our only other hawk flight for Memphis was on April 22, 1934, when 57 of 3 species were seen (Migrant, 15:27, 1934). Bald Eagles were noted at Mud Lake (from Nov. 11, but probably Oct.) and Horseshoe Lake, Ark. (reportedly throughout the year).

The first Myrtle Warbler was seen on Oct. 11 and White-throated Sparrows Oct. 10,—on schedule. Brewer's Blackbirds (rare) appeared at the Penal Farm: 8 on Nov. 5 (BC) and 3 on Dec. 3 (RDS) along with the rarer Western Meadowlark on the latter date. However, about three of these Meadowlarks have been heard there regularly up thru the last visit (March 6). Some other likely areas (to Arlington) were worked Jan. 21 without finding this species. Prairie Horned Larks and Lapland Longspurs built up to estimates of 250 each during the last of November. Killdeers at the farm totaled 700 on Nov. 5.

Unusual on the Memphis Count, Dec. 24, was a Great Horned Owl observed calling, southwest of Frayser, a suburb. Rarely recorded, another such was seen at Forest Hill Cemetery, Feb. 10 and subsequently by Oliver Irwin, and a third in Overton Park (1st record) on Feb. 12 by Victor Julia and since then by Scouts. Thompson Bonner reports a King Rail on Dec. 30 at Cobb Lake, Whitehaven. About 50 Canada Geese were reported wintering at Porter Lake (Horseshoe Lake) Ark., by Howard Barbig. A duck shot Dec. 16 at Reelfoot Lake seemed unusual to Gilbert Schloss of Memphis; his description perfectly fitted the Old Squaw and is considered to be a valid record. A few Horned Grebe returned to the Moon Lake Count and also occurred at Horseshoe Lake, 1 on Jan. 21 (RDS), and adjacent Porter Lake, 2 on Feb. 25 (T. O. S.).

The return of spring became official when a Purple Martin was seen Mar. 2 at Forrest City, Ark.; at Memphis two (Sechler) and one (Taylor) on March 5. Four Golden Plover at the Penal Farm (L. Coffey and G. R. Mayfield) on Mar. 6 may augur another record-breaking migration of this interesting species.—BEN B. COFFEY, JR.

NASHVILLE—The winter season in Middle Tennessee has been severe and in many ways dramatic as both Man and Bird can testify. Sub-zero

temperatures and snow Thanksgiving night with continued cold through December and January were merely forerunners of a terrific mid-winter ice storm with temperatures ranging from 13 to 20 degrees below zero. This severe weather with concomitant non-availability of food had an effect on birds of the region which has been of much interest and concern.

Fall migrations were unremarkable with general reports of a scarcity of migrating warblers. B. H. Abernathy received reports of more migrating geese than usual. An early record of 3 Pine Siskins in company with Goldfinches feeding on elm seeds Oct. 28-30 is reported by the writer.

The concensus of T.O.S. members is that the density of the bird population for the Nashville region has been notably low for the whole winter. Although present in a few erratic records the extreme scarcity of Robins, Grackles, Blue Jays, Cedar Waxwings, and Myrtle Warblers has been general. A scant hackberry crop and a probable shortage of other foods may have influenced these populations more than the severe weather. No large roost of Robins, Blackbirds, or Starlings was reported. A flock composed largely of Cowbirds and Redwings varying from an estimated 1000 in early January to 300 in late February fed in meadows and corn-fields along the South Harpeth River. During the same interval a flock of 100 doves fed in corn fields. Twenty Rusty Blackbirds were in the same area Dec. 30 and Jan. 1 and 6 (A.R.L. and K.A.G.). One species whose movement from the South Harpeth Valley seemed influenced by the zero temperature on Nov. 24 was the Turkey Vulture. They suddenly disappeared and did not return until after the mid-February thaw. One might say, "Lucky buzzards!" (see record of 4 on Christmas Count).

A highlight of the winter season was the discovery on Dec. 19 of a flock of 125 Pipits in Bell's Bend by A. F. Ganier and Ed Schreiber. Mr. Schreiber also says the Great Blue Heron remained at Roehm's Lake for several weeks after the Christmas Count. Notes from Mrs. Amelia Laskey's home records include a Bewick's Wren which wintered there and the return of a banded Robin on Jan. 16 that was defending territory after being absent for several months. Especially interesting was the appearance at her banding station of a Chipping Sparrow on Jan. 29, 1951. It remained to be joined by a second one on Feb. 21.

The toll of bird life and casualties short of death resulting from the "Great Ice Blizzard of '51" cannot be accurately estimated. Rain Jan. 28 turned to sleet and freezing rain which fell for three days following. Every twig, branch, limb, tree trunk, and grass blade was thickly ice-covered. Trees and limbs crashed for 24 hours from Jan. 31 to Feb. 1. By Feb. 1 about 5 inches of ice and sleet was topped by an equal measure of snow and dependably reported temperatures were 13, 18, and 20 degrees below zero. The total effect was bewildering, beautifully fantastic, and often cruel. It was fortunate for birds that the streams and spring-fed branches did not freeze. There was scarcely any break for near a week and the ground was not completely open until Feb. 13.

Numerous reports of Mockingbirds without tail feathers and one of a tailless Dove came to G. R. Mayfield who also had a report from Mrs.

Haywood Norman, Tyne Blvd., of 16 dead Bluebirds taken from her boxes with the additional 6 birds of her colony missing. Dr. Mayfield also received a report from Mr. Austin, Lebanon, Tenn., of three coveys of Quail frozen as they roosted in Cedars of Lebanon Park. Mrs. Laskey found feathered remains of 2 Bluebirds in Warner Park nesting boxes with no way to determine whether they were caught alive by predators or were eaten after death from freezing or starvation. She trapped a Dove with foot and tarsus swollen and sore from frost-bite. Mr. Abernathy took a half-frozen Brown Thrasher from his feeding shelf on Feb. 1. It revived, but died 3 days later. This victim of the storm established, however, a good winter record for the species. Mr. Abernathy reports his Bluebird population decimated by half. My own observations are confined to the rural region of the South Harpeth Valley and Basin Spring. Feathered remains of a Junco, Downy Woodpecker, and Starling were found on the snow Feb. 2. Hermit Thrushes, a Sapsucker, and Pileated Woodpecker were observed feeding on ice-covered sumac berries. The most startling apparent effect of the storm on bird-life in this woodland was the sudden and continued absence of Chickadees, Carolina Wrens, and Mockingbirds with a marked decrease in Titmice and Downy Woodpeckers. Twelve trips to this specific area during Dec. and Jan. show an average of 10 Chickadees per trip ranging up to as many as 18 and 31. From the beginning of the blizzard for 6 weeks not one single Chickadee was observed; then Mar. 11, only one individual which has not been since recorded. Two weeks later, March 25, 2 others were seen. Carolina Wrens and Mockingbirds show the same pattern of absence. Mrs. Laskey's March 16 notes from Warner Parks read, "Bluebirds still scarce. Only 5 seen. No Mockingbirds, Chickadees, or Wrens observed." From recent local trips Dr. Mayfield notes a marked scarcity of Bluebirds, Carolina Wrens, and Titmice with a normal abundance of Towhees and Cardinals. Miss Howell and Mr. Robins report Chickadees from Warner Park since the storm. From records and reports it appears that ground feeders such as the Dove, Killdeer, Meadowlark, Junco, Towhee, and Cardinal weathered the storm well, while Chickadees, Carolina Wrens, Bluebirds, and Mockingbirds were drastically affected.

The thaw made way for the return of winter-absent species. Turkey Vultures reappeared in the South Harpeth area Feb. 13; singing Horned Larks returned to nesting territory Feb. 17; Phoebe have been regularly present since Feb. 22; a Brown Thrasher was on Battery Lane Feb. 24 (A.R.L.); 4 Redheaded Ducks and 2 Canvasbacks were on Roehm's Lake the week of Mar. 12 (E.S.); Water Thrush, Mar. 15; flock of 15 Vesper Sparrows, Mar. 18 (K.A.G.). And so the seasons blend imperceptibly one into the other.—KATHERINE A. GOODPASTURE.

LEBANON—Perhaps the most interesting time of the winter, as well as the most heart-rending, was the period of severe weather between Jan. 29 and Feb. 9, when our world was sealed in with ice and snow, and the thermometer dropped to 13 degrees below zero. It snowed for several days before the sun came out on Feb. 2. During the severe weather

at least six Fox Sparrows were seen within a few feet of dwellings—two by Dixon Merritt, four by myself. The morning after the first snow I swept out a wide path only a few feet outside my bedroom windows, where I kept grain constantly. So many birds fed there that I never had to sweep it again despite the continued snow, for the birds kept it tramped down. By actual count I saw as many as 12 Field Sparrows, 8 White-throated Sparrows, 4 Fox Sparrows, 2 Song Sparrows, 30 Cardinals, 4 Chickadees, 5 Titmice, 20 Juncos, 2 Brown Creepers, 45 Grackles, 20 Mourning Doves, 38 Meadowlarks, 5 Cowbirds, 1 Flicker, 1 pair of Downy and 1 of Red-bellied Woodpeckers, 4 Crows, 2 Myrtle Warblers, 1 Carolina Wren, 15 Starlings, 20 English Sparrows, and 150 Horned Larks. I had never seen the Horned Larks so their appearance was most exciting. The first ones appeared on Feb. 2, 50 of them. The following day there were 75, the next 100, and the next 150. Then they began to decrease until on Feb. 9 when snow and ice were thawing, I saw only 2.—TRESSA DEAN WATERS.

KNOXVILLE—A Sudden cold snap immediately following a warm Thanksgiving Day was the most unusual weather event occurring in this area during the winter season. Large flocks of Robins and a few small flocks of Rusty Blackbirds were present in the woods where Dogwood berries were abundant for a short time after the cold snap, and then the flocks disappeared about the same time that the berries did. The only unusual species observed during December were Horned Grebe: 2 on Dec. 9 and 4 on Dec. 7, and Palm Warbler: one each on Dec. 2 and 9. Temperatures during January varied considerably, but with no severe storms. After the first of the year relatively few ducks have been observed. Turkey Vultures, Phoebes, and Ruby-crowned Kinglets were rare during January, and so were Robins until about the 23rd of January when numbers reappeared. Red-breasted Nuthatches and Pine Siskins were notably absent this year. One or two Red-headed Woodpeckers, two Pine Warblers, and one White-crowned Sparrow passed the winter in the vicinity of certain feeding stations in the Knoxville area. Another species that apparently wintered in small numbers was the Brown Thrasher, for one was seen on Jan. 14 and two remained in the vicinity of one house from Feb. 2 thru succeeding weeks.

Redwings and Grackle, both of which were absent during December and absent or very scarce in January, arrived in considerable numbers about Feb. 28. A few Purple Martins arrived during the first week of March, but a cold wave followed and few if any more appeared for the next two or three weeks. Another early migrant was a Louisiana Waterthrush, seen and heard singing on Mar. 18 (T.O.S.). At the time of this writing, more Brown Thrashers are being reported, but few other Spring migrants have yet arrived.—JAMES T. TANNER.

GREENEVILLE—The severe cold of the past winter undoubtedly affected the bird population in this area. The suddenness of the cold wave late in November caught some birds which had not migrated. Mr. and

Mrs. J. B. White observed three Grackles on their feeding table during the snow of this period. Cold Spring Mountain has been coated with ice and snow above 2500 feet a great many times during the winter. This may account for the unusually large number of Juncos in the foot-hills of the mountains and along the Nolichucky River.

Among the winter residents the following were more abundant than usual: Bluebirds, Sparrow Hawks, Juncos, Towhees, Shrikes, Goldfinches and Mockingbirds. Red-headed Woodpeckers have been very rare all winter. At this writing, March 22, they have not returned to the Tusculum College campus where they are always common summer residents. Cedar Waxwings have been scarce in this area, possibly because of a scarcity of cedar and holly berries. Three or four White-breasted Nuthatches spent the winter on the Tusculum campus, but Red-breasted Nuthatches, which were common a year ago, have not been observed. On Christmas Day fifteen Pine Siskins were observed by Mrs. Willis Clemens near her home at Tusculum; they were around for three days but were not seen again during the winter. Crows have been roosting in this county near Sunnyside for at least thirty years. When winters are severe in the north the number of crows wintering here is very large. The number for this past winter probably exceeded 20,000.

Among Spring arrivals are Grackles on Feb. 12 and Redwings on Feb. 27. Several species of birds began to sing during the spring-like weather between Feb. 10 and 15. On March 19 Mrs. Richard Nevius observed Carolina Wrens building a nest near her home.—C. M. SHANKS.

ELIZABETHTON—The weather during late summer and fall was approximately normal except for a total of ten inches of snow that fell before Dec. 20, which is more than we have had in any one winter during the past seven years, and except that November—with a minimum of 4 degrees on Nov. 25—and December have been colder than normal. Cold days during the winter were Jan. 9 with 16 degrees and Feb. 3 with 6 degrees.

There was quite an influx of shore birds on the mud flats of Watauga Lake between mid-August and mid-September. This is unusual in that formerly there was no suitable place for sandpipers to feed. The birds observed here were Killdeer, Semipalmated Plover, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and the Spotted, Solitary, Least, and Pectoral Sandpipers.

Of particular interest is the relatively large number of late departure dates for species during 1950 compared with the preceding six years. For sixteen species, last records for the species were from one to seventeen days later than the last records of preceding years. The most delayed were Summer Tanager last recorded on Oct. 20, 1950, compared with a previous last record of Oct. 3, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo last seen on Oct. 18, 1950, compared with Oct. 3.

Of special interest was the occurrence of a Florida Gallinule at the junction of Roan Creek and Watauga Lake on Oct. 1 (Mr. and Mrs. L.R.H.). This is the first record we have of this species in this area. At the same location 2 Snowy Egrets appeared on Aug. 23 and remained to Oct. 2. An

Upland Plover appeared on the lawn near the Franklin Club within the city limits of Elizabethton on Sept. 23 and remained there until Oct. 16. Also on Sept. 23 F. W. Behrend and others observed 5 Upland Plovers on top of Big Bald Mountain at an elevation of approximately 5200'. On Sept. 2 a flock of approximately 40 Common Terns and 25 Black Terns were observed on Watauga Lake by Mr. and Mrs. L. R. Herndon; this is the second record of Common Terns in Carter County and the first of Black Terns. During September and October a concerted effort was made to observe migrating hawks; the considerable success of these observations is summarized in the December 1950 MIGRANT.

Arrival dates for some of the waterfowl on Watauga Lake and Watauga River were: Common Loon, Sept. 8; Horned Grebe, Nov. 4; American Egret, Aug. 23; Canada Goose, Oct. 29; Mallard Duck, Nov. 5; Black Duck, Nov. 5; Baldpate, Nov. 5; Redhead, Dec. 2; Ring-necked Duck, Nov. 4; Scaup, Oct. 29; Ruddy Duck, Oct. 21; Hooded Merganser, Nov. 5; Coot, Oct. 7. There appeared to be a rather large influx of ducks during the last week of October and the first of November. Other interesting records of waterfowl during the winter were: Canada Goose, Feb. 2; Old Squaw Duck, Feb. 3 to Mar. 17,—this is the first record of this species in our territory, and the bird has been present on Wilbur Lake during the entire time.

Phoebes were absent from Jan. 1 until Feb. 24; this is the first winter in which Phoebes have not been present all thru the winter. One Ruby-crowned Kinglet was reported on Jan. 7 and not reported again until Feb. 10; this is unusual for they are usually present thruout the winter.

An early spring migrant was a Magnolia Warbler seen on Mar. 10. It was seen by Mr. and Mrs. L. R. Herndon in their yard in company with a flock of Myrtle Warblers. It was observed for ten to fifteen minutes at such close range that binoculars could not be focused, and the very yellow underparts heavily streaked along the sides with dark stripes identified the bird as this species.

Tree Sparrows, 3 on Dec. 24 and 2 on Dec. 31, recorded by F. W. Behrend, were new records for this territory. The only Pine Siskin seen in this territory this season was seen by F. W. Behrend at Carver's Gap on Feb. 18. Other interesting records follow: Savannah Sparrow, Feb. 18; Grackle and Cowbird, Feb. 24; Redwing, Feb. 28; Chipping Sparrow, Mar. 3; Rusty Blackbird and Brewer's Blackbird, Mar. 13. The Rusty Blackbird was being observed thru 7x50 binoculars at a distance of about 25' when the Brewer's Blackbird walked into the field of view, and its iridescent color was conspicuous in contrast to the drab color of the Rusties. The Brewer's Blackbird was observed again on the following day in a tree in the same yard by the same observer (L.M.H.).—LEE R. HERNDON.

BRISTOL AREA—Weather conditions were in direct reverse from those of last winter. Temperatures were subnormal thru February and much of March. There was more snow and rain. The severe weather of early winter had no appreciable effect upon the winter residents. Phoebes and Flickers, which are often scarce during severe weather, were in customary

numbers, as were Killdeer, and White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows. Tree Sparrows, on the other hand, were present for the first time since 1946. Mourning Doves were perhaps scarcer than usual thruout the early part of the winter but were back in fair numbers by late February. Ruby-crowned Kinglets were in slightly greater numbers than usual in the early winter. Red-breasted Nuthatches were not seen this winter in the lowlands, contrasting with the large counts of last year.

The filling of the newly completed South Holston Reservoir is resulting in the observation of more ducks in this area than ever before. Since Feb. 11 fourteen species have been seen there. Unusual numbers or species are as follows: Mallard, maximum count 59; Baldpate, 61 on Mar. 6 and 52 on Mar. 22; Pintail, 32 on Mar. 6; Wood Duck, first noted on Feb. 20; Canvasback, 2 on Feb. 11 and 2 on Feb. 20, first county records; Lesser Scaup, 57 on Mar. 6 and 66 on Mar. 22; American Golden-eye, maximum of 225 on Feb. 11; Bufflehead, 5 on Mar. 22; Old Squaw, 1 on Feb. 11; Hooded Merganser, maximum of 20 on Mar. 6; American Merganser, 2 on Feb. 11. A count of 9 Ring-billed Gulls and 1 Herring Gull on the reservoir is the first time that more than one gull has been observed at the same time in this area.

Two records were made of Sora, one a definite winter record on January 30 and the second possibly a migrant on Mar. 6.

On Mar. 1 1800 Redwings were seen at the mill pond in Abingdon, Va. The first Savannah Sparrow was seen on Mar. 2 and the first Black-crowned Night Heron on Mar. 23.—STEPHEN M. RUSSELL.

NOTES HERE AND THERE

A MISCELLANY OF CORRECTIONS

In the article on the Horned Lark, by Katherine A. Goodpasture, in the September 1950 MIGRANT, "1000 feet" in the next to the last line of page 38 should read "100 feet".

The following corrections apply to the "Birds of Carter County, Tennessee," by Lee R Herndon, in the December 1950 MIGRANT: under American Egret, substitute Nov. 15 for Nov. 5; under Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, the second sentence should read "The bird was about thirty feet from the observer for several minutes while under observation with 10x binoculars"; under Rough-winged Swallow, a very late date of Sept. 10, 1948, was omitted; entirely omitted was "Red-breasted Nuthatch, rare permanent resident"; under Loggerhead Shrike, a late record of May 6, 1945, was omitted; under Warbling Vireo, the extremely late records of Nov. 6 and 13, 1949 (E.E.) were omitted; under Connecticut Warbler, the record of June 18, 1949, was apparently in error and should have been omitted; under Orchard Oriole, the early date Apr. 4 should be

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**The simple truth about birds is interesting enough;
it is not necessary to go beyond it.**

Apr. 7; under Grasshopper Sparrow, the early date should have been March 30 instead of March 20; under Palm Warbler, July 9 should be June 11.

A note from Ben B. Coffey says, "A Little Blue Heron was included in the Count (Christmas Count for 1950 from Memphis) but unfortunately the record was erroneous and should be disregarded."

NOTICE OF THE ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of the Tennessee Ornithological Society will be held on Saturday and Sunday, May 12 and 13, 1951, at Standing Stone State Park, 10 miles northwest of Livingston, Tenn. This is an innovation for State meetings of the T. O. S., it having been decided upon at the Nashville meeting last May. The Park Lodge will be headquarters and this and a number of nearby furnished summer cabins have been reserved for the occasion. The park includes 8,700 acres of high hills and valleys, heavily timbered and quite scenic. There is also a beautiful lake, clear streams, waterfall and picturesque trails all about. As much of our time as possible will be spent afield. There will be business and program sessions late Saturday afternoon and evening and papers are hereby solicited. Those wishing to remain on thru the following week will find the place very attractive for vacationing. All members are urged to attend and those planning to do so should notify the Committee Chairman, Mr. A. F. Ganier, not later than May 5 in order that reservations may be made. He will prepare a mimeographed letter of information on April 20 and this will be sent to those requesting it. A full attendance from all parts of the State is expected. Communications should be sent to the Chairman at 2112 Woodlawn Dr., Nashville 12, Tenn.—MRS. BEN B. COFFEY, JR., President.

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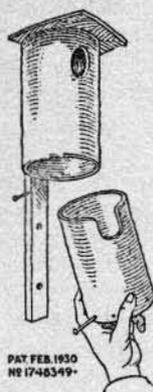
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ARTISTS' SUPPLIES

MOTION PICTURE EQUIPMENT

CINE KODAKS

KODAKS

GRAFLEX CAMERAS

STEREO PRISM BINOCULARS

FIELD GLASSES

Are Headquarters For

D U R Y / S